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ABSTRACT

This book chapter discusses the problem of transiency, or high classroom turnover, in education. Research shows that a disproportionate number of schools with predominantly low-income African American and Hispanic students have low stability, and that such students are much more likely than white, middle-income students to switch schools in the middle of the year. High student mobility has consequences for students, teachers, and schools (e.g., lower achievement levels, slower academic pacing, and lower teaching satisfaction). Housing instability is a major trigger in moving children out of their classrooms. Poor families move 50-100 percent more often than non-poor families. Welfare reform has resulted in residential mobility. Migrant children typically move from community to community. Foster children often change schools each time they are removed from a home. The federal role in education emphasizes meeting the needs of disadvantaged students, and subgroups who are mobile are among the most disadvantaged. However, the government has taken a very minimal role in confronting this issue. After describing various federal efforts to help transient students, the paper presents recommendations to reduce and handle mobility (federal, state, and local education policies; housing policies; homelessness, welfare, and migrant family policies; and needed research). (SM)

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High Classroom Turnover:
How Children Get Left Behind.

Chester Hartman

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Chapter 16

High Classroom Turnover: How Children Get Left Behind

by Chester Hartman[1]

Introduction

A 1994 U.S. General Accounting Office study reported that by the end of the third grade one out of six children had attended three or more schools, and that students often changed schools more than once during the school year.[2] A Texas study found that one of six students in the state's public schools[3] changed schools during the 1994-95 school year.[4] A National School Boards Association article[5] reports, "it's not unheard of for a child to change schools six or seven times in a single year." A Las Vegas elementary school reported 700 transfers in or out in a single year among a total student body of just over 900.[6] A California study reported that approximately one-quarter of students made unscheduled school changes three or more times over the course of their public school career.[7] While a majority of California high schools have student mobility rates ranging between 10 and 30%, approximately 20% of the state's high schools have very high student mobility rates — more than 30%.[8] Not surprisingly, high mobility rates are even more daunting when viewed over time: Over the course of four years, overall school stability can fall to under 50%.[9]

The extensive literature on problems with the county's education system, along with the many proposed and needed reforms, has paid far too little attention to the issue of transiency, or high classroom turnover. And while there is a modest amount of literature in the professional, academic, and technical journals, little appears in general circulation periodicals that speak to the wider public.[10] Smaller schools and classrooms, better trained teachers, better buildings and equipment, and other essential improvements can have only minimal positive impact if the classroom is something of a revolving door, with high proportions of the students leaving and arriving during the school year and from school year to school year (although a case can be made that instituting reforms such as these might serve to reduce transiency).[11]

In locales receiving large numbers of immigrants, there is of course a fairly steady influx of such children entering the school system throughout the school year — students with acculturation and language issues that require special attention. Beyond the special case of immigrant-receiving communities, to the extent the incidence of such transiency is disproportionately higher among certain identifiable groups — in particular, low-income, homeless, farmworker, and minority children — the already inadequate education received by such students is grossly magnified. Research from the University of Chicago's Center for School Improvement reported that "a disproportionate number of predominantly African-American schools have low stability" and that such students are twice as likely as white students

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to switch schools in the middle of the year.[12] An Austin study reported that "low-income, African American and Hispanic students were more likely to be mobile than middle-income or White peers."[13] A Minneapolis study reported that "students of color moved far more often than white students" and that "1 in 4 low income students moved one or more times during the study. Only 1 in 10 students who did not qualify for the free lunch program moved."[14] In California, ". . . mobility was clearly related to family income and socioeconomic status — low-income students were more mobile between the 8th and 12th grades than high-income students."[15]

In sum, there is clear need for recognition of the problem of transiency: its magnitude, incidence, causes, and results. And based on that knowledge, there is concomitant need to mount a serious attack on the problem, reducing it where possible, handling it in the most constructive manner where it persists. The federal government, as well as state governments and most school districts, have not dealt with this serious issue in any way commensurate with the problem. And unless policies and programs are put into place to deal with the fact that "schools [mainly urban schools] are actually unstable places where the movement of students penetrates the central aspect of school work — the interaction of teachers and students around learning,"[16] there will surely be millions of children left behind.

Students of course move from one to school to another when passing through the various grade groupings — elementary, middle, and high schools. Our concern is with (non-promotional) moves that occur within those groupings. Some occur in between school years, others within a school year. While both of those changes may have deleterious effects, obviously the more disruptive of the two are within-school year changes. As a Los Angeles study concluded, "Intraschool [within school year] site transfer is especially damaging to the instructional program."[17] Not all such changes are damaging or undesirable: Families may move in order to improve their housing or work situation; students may change to a different school or classroom in order to secure a more appropriate educational environment or leave an unsatisfactory or damaging one. A very large portion of such moves, however — almost certainly the majority, particularly for low-income, minority, homeless, and farmworker students — are triggered or necessitated by factors that are not associated with positive change for the family or student.

What triggers such potentially damaging moves may be categorized as either external to or internal to the school situation and environment. The former category consists primarily of residential changes on the part of the student's family, which in turn may be caused by the workings of the housing system or (less frequently) by changes in the household situation, such as family breakup; the latter refers to a range of reasons, including expulsion by school authorities and problems or dissatisfactions on the part of the student and his/her family that lead to transfers. In the case of lower income, minority, homeless, and farmworker children — the principal concern of this chapter — residential changes are for the most part not under the family's control or, in the case of farmworkers, are dictated by expected and planned changes in employment location. The housing-related forces that cause involuntary residential changes include eviction or mortgage foreclosure proceedings,[18] anticipated eviction, inability to pay rent or utility bills, housing code enforcement, eminent domain actions, condominium conversions, upgrading rehabilitation, and other gentrification pressures.

To the extent such involuntary residential moves, as well as "push" factors from within the school environment, cause harm to a student's education, it is certainly an important goal of public policy to reduce their incidence wherever possible. A second public

policy goal is to put in place systems that, to the extent feasible, minimize the deleterious impact of these moves. Such steps are vital if we are to take seriously the right of all children to an adequate education.

I. What the Research Shows Regarding Academic Performance

High student mobility has consequences for mobile students, nonmobile students, teachers, and schools. For students, the long-term effects of high mobility include lower achievement levels and slower academic pacing, culminating in a reduced likelihood of high school completion. Data on how highly mobile classrooms affect nonmobile students in those classrooms are rare, but in all likelihood such patterns significantly retard curriculum pacing and decrease social and educational attachments to fellow students.[19] Migrant farmworker children, who arrive and leave in relatively large numbers, staying for just a short period, are particularly disruptive for the nonmobile students in these classrooms. (In Washington State, one school segregated migrant students from regular classrooms, holding that integrating them would be too disruptive to the school.) For teachers, although again there are no available data, it is likely that teaching and teaching satisfaction suffer from the need to repeat and review lessons, constantly introduce new students to the class, experience the sudden departure of other students, and preside over a generally less stable environment. For schools, high mobility rates clearly place a strain on school resources — an example being loss of textbooks when departing students fail to return them.[20]

Regarding what causes this mobility, the primacy of housing instability as the trigger to move a child out of his/her classroom is evident in several reports. As a general phenomenon, "families that are poor move 50% to 100% more frequently than families that are not poor."[21] The Chicago study documented that 58% of elementary school changes were related to residential moves.[22] In California, parents reported approximately 55% of high school changes were associated with residential moves.[23] A Minneapolis study reported that of the residential moves, 80% were associated with housing problems, such as substandard conditions, inability to find affordable housing, problems with landlords, evictions, or property condemnation.[24,25] But residential moves are sometimes made for reasons other than coping with a housing issue, such as lack of transportation or availability of employment.

Homelessness — the ultimate housing problem — is of course a major reason why children must change schools. And since the child's school is usually his or her second most important stable environment, losing both home and school represents a doubly powerful blow. It is not uncommon for homeless families to move several times a year, and as a result, homeless children may change schools several times. Homeless children continually face difficulty in school: For example, young children may lag behind in basic skills acquisition; high school age children often drop out due to difficulty in accumulating credits or schools' refusal to enroll unaccompanied youth. Two prevalent educational practices that exacerbate the negative impacts of mobility for homeless children are application of residency rules and failure to provide transportation.[26] A further significant problem for such students is failure to transfer school records, leaving the new teacher with inadequate information as to the child's past preparation and current needs. A recent development is the establishment of "shelter schools," opened in homeless shelters, a controversial, possibly

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illegal step with as yet unstudied implications for classroom transiency.[27]

Welfare reform has had a still incompletely documented impact on residential, hence school, mobility.[28] Employment programs may necessitate a move in order to arrange a workable commuting pattern; and those who reach welfare support time limits may no longer be able to afford rent and utility payments. Research on welfare reform suggests that those who leave the welfare rolls are more likely to be residentially mobile than those who remain on welfare, doubtless caused in large part by employment opportunities that require or prompt a move. Such "success" thus has costs and unintended consequences. People who leave welfare are also somewhat more likely to have trouble paying rent, to be evicted, or to move their children in with another family because of inability to maintain a household continuously.[29] More distant moves — from one state to another in response to state differences in welfare policies (or scarcity of affordable housing) — also are reported. A 50-state survey indicated that welfare reform may lead to unstable family income, which in turn creates a greater likelihood that children will experience turbulence, such as more residential and school changes.[30] A National Association of Child Advocates presentation concluded, "evidence suggests that welfare reform has increased student mobility for a small but particularly high risk population of students."[31]

As noted above, migrant families, largely located in Texas, California, and Florida, typically move temporarily from a homebase community to other communities within the state or other states, following harvests and crop-related agribusiness in migrant streams. As a report in the *Title I Monitor* described their situation: "[T]he mobility of migrant children plays havoc on the planned schedules of this nation's schools. These children ping-pong from school to school, swelling classrooms for often brief periods until they leave again. Because of variations in weather, changes in crops, and the difficulties in finding work, migrant families have in recent years been forced to alter traditional patterns of migrancy, often traveling to new states or even new regions of the country in search of work."[32] These increasingly fragmented migrant streams have expanded to become international as well. And so migrant children typically change schools several times a year. Similar to homeless children, migrant children often face barriers to enrolling in schools; youth often have difficulty accumulating academic credits and therefore face difficulty completing high school. The records transfer problem noted above for homeless children is even more severe for children of migrant families, as their moves generally are far more distant. Since the vast majority of migrant family school-age children are Latino, language and cultural adjustment problems are prevalent. Research consistently finds that migrant children face limited educational opportunities, oftentimes resulting in high dropout rates as well as low achievement rates and slower academic growth.[33]

Foster care children often have to change schools each time they are removed from a home. The failure of local child protection systems to make prompt placements adds to this instability.[34] Like homeless and migrant children, foster care children can have difficulty with transfer of records, including health records. Additionally, children who are having difficulty negotiating the stresses of being placed in foster care are often disproportionately moved to special education classes as a result of behavioral problems.

While residentially related reasons produce the majority of mobility, at least among the subpopulations that are the primary concern of this chapter, it is also important to recognize that a considerable portion of mobility is not associated with residential changes. Among the nonresidentially related reasons for school changes reported in the

Chicago study, 76% were motivated in whole or part by dissatisfaction with the school, trouble with peers or teachers, academic difficulties, or school safety concerns.[35] Interviews with students in California revealed that a majority of student-initiated high school changes were made in order to escape a bad situation (social isolation, unsafe conditions, etc.) rather than to seek a better situation, and that school-initiated transfers were administrative decisions in response to a disciplinary situation, poor attendance, truancy, or poor achievement.[36]

Research findings on the academic impact of high student mobility show that it can have a slowing effect on basic skills acquisition, which has the long-term effect of increasing the chances of school failure and dropout. A review in the *Journal of Research and Development in Education* concluded: "[T]he educational research literature seems quite consistent with regard to findings that high student transiency rates are strongly and negatively associated with academic attainment at school."[37] A carefully designed study of data from the National Health Interview Survey concluded that "frequent family relocation [school changes were not recorded, but the relationship between residential and school relocation is obvious] (approximately five or six moves over the life of the child [6 to 17 years old in this study] . . . was significantly associated with an increased risk of failing a grade and with multiple, frequently occurring behavioral problems [which of course are associated with poor school performance as well]."[38] For elementary students, the negative educational impacts are especially obvious. Students who are highly mobile during their elementary school years are much more likely to change schools during their high school years.[39] In Chicago, even after controlling for socio-economic status, mobile students on average have lower student achievement scores than their stable counterparts.[40] With just one move, students appear to recover over time, but each additional school change results in a cumulative academic lag. Over a period of six years, students who have moved more than three times can fall a full academic year behind stable students.[41] A study of reading achievement tests in California showed that students who moved three or more times scored nearly 20 points lower than students who did not move.[42] And "there is overwhelming evidence that mobility during high school diminishes the prospects for graduation: students who changed high schools even once were less than half as likely as stable students to graduate from high school, even controlling for other factors that influence high school completion."[43] High school changes may disrupt credit accumulation and therefore affect graduation levels.[44] Students who changed high schools at least twice were more than 30% less likely to graduate than students who remained in the same school throughout their high school career; the graduation rate of students who moved at least twice is approximately 60%.[45] The graduation rate of migrant students is about 50%.[46] Attendance is related to mobility and to school performance. The Minneapolis study reported: "Attendance proved to be a strong predictor of performance for students in the study, a correlation found in other local and national research. . . . The less students moved, the better their attendance rates. Students who did not move during the course of the study had an average attendance rate of 94%. Students with three or more moves dropped to an 84% average rate."[47] Schools' failure to track students who leave and to transfer records promptly doubtless is one important factor affecting attendance. Student mobility also affects students' engagement with schools, resulting in increased incidents of misbehavior and lower participation in school activities.[48] Children who move around a lot not only get a poorer educational experience, they also are subject to social and emotional stress caused by

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disruption in their relationships with classmates and teachers.

For schools, high student mobility rates place a greater burden on their resources and budgeting. Teachers have reported that student mobility can affect decisions related to personnel and staffing, resource utilization, school program planning, instructional delivery and continuity, curricular pace, and student evaluation.[49] Student mobility can also constrain staff time, detract from per pupil resources, and slow school-improvement and community-building efforts.[50]

II. Government Roles and Responsibilities

The federal role in education primarily focuses on meeting the needs of disadvantaged students, and certainly the subgroups who are most mobile are among the most disadvantaged — their high mobility rates adding considerably to their other disadvantaging characteristics. Despite what should suffice as overwhelming evidence of the magnitude and deleterious impact of high classroom mobility (only a portion of which has been presented here), there has been a far too minimal role and responsibility taken by the various levels of government to deal with the issue. What little there is that specifically deals with transiency problems appears in legislation and programs for those most obviously transient: homeless and farmworker children. Funding states receive through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act does provide important supportive educational services, but for the most part in the form of general assistance for a larger class of problems rather than that focused specifically on problems caused by high mobility.

Pursuant to the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act's Education for Homeless Children and Youth program, reauthorized/signed into law in January 2002 as the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, homeless children and youth have a right to equal access to the same free, appropriate, and nonsegregated public education provided to other children.[51] The original and reauthorized Acts impose a duty upon state and local agencies to remove barriers to enrollment, attendance, and success in schools. The newly reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the new McKinney-Vento legislation provide new strength to provisions designed to keep children who become homeless in their school of origin, for the remainder of the academic year even if the child is permanently housed outside that school's boundaries (subject of course to parents' or guardians' wishes); provide that if the homeless child chooses to attend a school in a more convenient location, the school shall immediately enroll the child even if appropriate records and proof of residence are unavailable, and the school is obligated to obtain necessary records from the child's previous school; require local education agencies to provide and pay for transportation to and from the school of origin (and in cases where the student relocates outside the district served by that agency that obligation falls on the agencies in both areas); bar (with grandfathered exceptions in four designated counties) segregation of homeless students in separate schools or separate programs/settings within schools. The newly reauthorized ESEA requires states to coordinate their Title I plan and services with the McKinney-Vento Act.[52]

Useful examples of state and local government policies and programs are as follows: Illinois state law requires school districts to share responsibility when homeless children cross district lines.[53] The Victoria (Texas) Independent School District, with a heavily Latino enrollment, has implemented, as part of its McKinney program, a "One Child, One School, One Year" policy that supports

homeless students' efforts to remain in their school of origin, by providing transportation services; creating a Family Connection program that operates after-school community homework centers located near subsidized housing developments, low-rent motels, and homeless shelters; operating a Parent Place to check out school materials, provide snacks, and run small computer labs; appointing parent liaisons who counsel highly mobile families; and coordinating services for children and their families in transitional living situations.[54] The Houston Independent School District also has a "One Child, One School, One Year" policy, and its transportation department will bus homeless kids anywhere in the district.

The Migrant Education Program, funded under Title I of the ESEA, provides supplemental help to support the educational needs of migrant children, in recognition of the fact that the local education agency-based structure of the basic Title I program did not meet the needs of children who constantly are on the move from school district to school district. Funds are available for summer and intersession programs, tutoring and counseling, and accurate credit accrual and records transfer systems. This last-mentioned issue is of particular salience, given that children of farmworker families move considerable distances (often interstate). Health as well as academic records are crucial — the former particularly important, given the multiple dangers of farm labor from pesticides and dangerous equipment, the possibility of over-immunization, and generally poor access to health care. Texas' New Generation System,[55] developed by the Texas Education Agency, and supported by a consortium of state migrant education programs, provides to subscribers Internet access to a comprehensive (but confidential) database of education and health information on more than 200,000 migrant children, school facilities where migrant children have been enrolled, a range of general information, and a toll-free technical assistance line. Other Texas-initiated programs are Project SMART [Summer Migrants Access Resources Through Technology], a national distance learning program, using public television stations, cable operators, tapes, and videocassettes, available in nearly two dozen states;[56] ESTRELLA, "a [five-year interstate initiative] program using laptop computers to transform the home into a dynamic learning environment," designed for students home-based in Texas;[57] and the Texas Migrant Interstate program, whose goal is "to increase the graduation rate of migrant students by promoting coordination/cooperation of migrant education programs that provide services to migrant students."[58] A National Hotline for Migrant Families, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, provides assistance with education issues (in addition to assisting with health, housing, food, and clothing problems).[59] To deal with the increasingly salient issue of back-and-forth Mexican-U.S. migration, the Binational Migrant Education Program provides a range of services. In the education area, these include a binational teacher exchange program, a free textbook distribution program, adult literacy programs, and binational document transfer services.[60] The recently passed Elementary and Secondary Education Act reauthorization contains significant strengthening of existing records transfer provisions, and also adds provisions tightening the parent involvement requirements.[61]

III. Recommendations

There is a great deal that can and should be done to reduce damaging mobility and to handle mobility in the most constructive way when it is unavoidable. A crucial threshold step is making policymakers in a variety of areas, as well as the general public (parents in particular), aware of the prevalence and

severity of the problem and the ways it may inadvertently be caused or exacerbated by various public policies. Policy changes are needed at all levels of government, and in far more areas than just the sphere of education. A starter list includes:

A. Education Policies at the Federal, State, and School District Level

The federal accountability framework should provide adequate safeguards, and enforce them strictly, to ensure that state and local entities protect educational rights for highly mobile students. In particular, the federal government should take the lead in improving records transfers and communications among states and school districts, as well as between the United States and countries (notably Mexico) that regularly send migrant workers to the United States.

States should mandate standardized collection and reporting of school mobility data, as a vital tool in understanding the nature of the problem and devising solutions. According to a survey of state departments of education research and assessment officials conducted by the Harvard Graduate School of Education's Principals' Center, "few state departments of education report student mobility rates" and although "school districts typically report some form of student mobility rate . . . its pervasiveness is difficult to assess because equations are based on varying formulae and timetables." (The Center's report also notes that "national data on student mobility is particularly scarce.")[62] State leadership and a supervisory role are particularly important with respect to interdistrict moves, as well as ensuring that adequate attention and responsibility exist for the time between school moves, as there often is a several-week period when the student is attending no school at all.

While federal and state government have key roles to play in mandating responsibility and providing necessary resources, it is at the local level that changed practices are needed and where effective improvements can manifest themselves. School districts should make every effort to retain students who move a short distance (even if they move out of the district), at least until the end of the school year. To the extent this requires transportation assistance, this should be made available. When students do leave, health and academic records should be promptly transferred to the receiving school. Best practices of some local school districts should be widely promulgated for adoption all over the country. As one example, the Minneapolis Public Schools enable students to maintain school continuity whenever possible, so only approximately 5% of intradistrict student mobility results in school changes.[63] Among their practices is institution of a districtwide curriculum that ensures that children who move frequently will find their new classrooms at approximately the same instructional point as the classroom they left. The work of the Victoria Independent School District described above is a model, particular for families in transitional housing situations. The Chicago Panel on School Policy has promulgated a Mobility Awareness Action Plan (titled "Staying Put"), designed to make educators, students, and parents aware of the damaging academic and social consequences of student mobility; promote establishment of school-based programs to deal with mobile students; and disseminate information about the Chicago public schools' open enrollment policy as an alternative to changing schools. Their brochure, "If You Move . . . your children could lose more than their next door neighbors," imparts basic data on the negative consequences of changing schools, outlines existing rights to avoid an unwanted transfer, and provides "If you do move" tips.

A case study of a Los Angeles elementary school with extraordinarily high (60-90%) annual transiency rates among its exceed-

ingly poor, overwhelmingly Latino student body illustrated the many ways in which unavoidable transiency can be handled as humanely as possible to create a "culture of caring." Included in the school's armamentarium of approaches are a sensitive intake process; restructured classrooms to handle the problem of limited English proficiency; team structures to support teachers, students, and parents; and strategies for providing individualized instruction.[64] Las Vegas uses a "buddy system" to ease the adjustment period for newcomers, pairing each arriving student with a long-timer.[65] School construction plans and policies should factor in the impact on mobility required by such activities; attention should be given to alternatives that call for rebuilding schools in existing neighborhoods over new construction in more outlying locations.[66] Local school board redistricting decisions, fraught as they already are with so many considerations, focusing primarily on race and class concerns, should also take into account the impact on student mobility.[67] And to the extent that issues such as school suspension policies and dropout prevention programs intersect with mobility, they need to be handled with that problem in mind, particularly since those issues disproportionately impact the same student populations who are highly mobile.[68]

A somewhat different aspect of school policies has to do with the recent move toward accountability, embodied in the reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which has much to offer in ensuring educational rights. Highly transient schools are very likely to show up poorly in performance indicators and other measures by which they are evaluated.[69] This creates the risk that transient children may be left outside the boundaries of public accountability. In particular, we must guard against the possibility that accountability systems will increase interschool mobility by creating incentives to transfer students as a method of excluding students from school data. It is vital that all students be included in whatever accountability systems are created. And of course the concomitant obligation is to provide whatever assistance is needed to ensure that mobile students do not fall behind. Accountability systems can employ strategies and policies, use multiple measures, create shared responsibility for students, provide opportunity to learn standards, and evaluate student progress over a period of years in order to hold schools accountable for *all* students. Implementation of accountability systems that employ high-stakes strategies without investing in opportunities to learn will inevitably lead to unacceptable results.

B. Housing Policies

Whereas there is overwhelming evidence that the majority of school mobility is a function of housing mobility, the school mobility literature has paid surprisingly little attention to housing policy reform — virtually all recommendations focus on school policies. But as a study using National Health Interview Survey data concluded: "our findings . . . suggest that residential stability may mediate the ill effects associated with children's school lives."[70]

The greatest boost to residential stability — hence to school stability — of course would come from a vast increase in the supply of decent housing affordable to all. That would create a situation where pressures to move — from demand exceeding supply, unaffordable rent increases, gentrification, and other destabilizing market forces — would be markedly reduced. Ideally, such new and newly rehabilitated housing should be produced by socially oriented, rather than profit-oriented, entities. A program to accomplish this goal will require far greater amounts of government subsidies than now are provided, plus stronger direction of these subsidies into the below-market sector.[71]

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Over recent years, there has been a massive loss in the supply of low-income housing units. Housing trends nationally reflect a decreasing supply of housing that is both affordable for and available to low-income families, generally resulting in a sharp decrease in the supply of affordable private market rentals.[72] Minorities of course still face overt and covert discrimination on the part of the various housing gatekeepers. Since existing research indicates that housing instability and changes are the principal trigger for school changes, and since for lower income, minority, homeless, and farmworker families such changes tend to be largely involuntary, any substantial reduction in the incidence of housing-related school changes necessarily involves intervention in the housing system. That small portion of the nation's housing stock that is in public and nonprofit ownership offers the most hopeful prospect for reduction in undesirable school changes; since such housing is disproportionately occupied by those families who are the primary concern of this chapter, some important gains are possible here. We recommend the following:

- Local public housing authorities should be made aware of the impact of forced displacement on children's education. Notably, the HOPE VI program, which is demolishing tens of thousands of units in public housing projects all over the country and displacing occupants,[73] should at a minimum time its displacement activities so as to avoid the necessity for children to change schools during the school year; and family relocation programs should factor in locational considerations so as to minimize the probability that students will need to change schools. The federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) should mandate such planning procedures for local housing authorities. Similarly, eviction actions initiated by local housing authorities should take into consideration such timing questions and insofar as possible not act so as to impose unnecessary educational damage on families they feel they must remove.

- Community development corporations (CDCs)[74] and other nonprofit sponsors/owners/managers of housing — entities that are in the housing business not to maximize profits but to provide a decent residential environment at the lowest cost — should take school relocation issues into account when they feel they must force tenants to move.

Privately owned rental housing of course is more difficult to regulate or influence; owners of such housing generally have little interest in the overall welfare of their tenant families, and in their efforts at profit maximization will take steps detrimental to sitting tenants. What can help such tenants most in creating the residential stability that in turn ensures school stability for their children are local and state regulations creating something along the lines of a "right to stay put."[75] Obviously, rent and "just cause" eviction controls, as well as condominium conversion and demolition controls, can do a great deal to ensure residential stability, and to the extent that in turn ensures school stability, this adds to the argument that such housing regulations benefit those being harmed by the workings of the unfettered housing market.[76] To the extent that various federal, state, and local anti-discrimination laws help create additional stability, these too can assist in reducing school mobility problems; and expanding the category of factors that fall under such laws will add to such protections. Mortgage foreclosure programs and eviction prevention programs in place in some localities provide an additional source of stability, and these should be adopted widely.[77]

The society's interest in promoting school stability — which can and should be enhanced via dissemination and wider understanding of research results showing the harm caused by instability — might also lead to limited eviction protections based explicitly on avoiding the harm of forced moves during the school year. We already have scattered laws that forbid or postpone eviction, at least temporarily, under certain circumstances. Examples are local ordinances that disallow eviction (or utility shutoffs, which can effectively force people to move) when the temperature falls below a certain level. An amendment to the District of Columbia Landlord-Tenant Act (section 2, D.C. Act 4-143, new section 501a) stipulates that "no landlord shall evict a tenant on any day when the National Weather Service predicts at 8 a.m. that the temperature at the National Airport Weather Station will not exceed twenty degrees Fahrenheit within the next twenty-four hours." And the 1940 Soldiers' and Sailors' Civil Relief Act (besides requiring temporary reduction in mortgage interest rates, hence monthly payments) forbids or closely regulates evictions and mortgage foreclosure actions for reservists and National Guard personnel called up for active duty.[78] Relatedly, the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development issued a telegram in February 1977 ("Subject: Weather/Fuel Shortage Problems") to all HUD regional and area offices enunciating a policy that "no persons will be evicted from HUD-owned property unless you are certain that the persons evicted are able to move into decent, safe, sanitary and satisfactorily heated housing. Absent such assurances, no occupants will be evicted."[79] A unanimous Massachusetts Supreme Court decision upheld a Cambridge ordinance that gives the city discretion to grant or withhold eviction permits when the purchaser of a condominium wants to evict the current occupant so a new purchaser can move into the unit. The court held that there was a legitimate public interest to be served in government regulation of evictions.[80] To the extent it can be shown that forced displacement imposes severe educational costs on those most in need of a good education, laws might be passed forbidding eviction — in tandem with programs providing short-term financial relief — so that such forced moves could not occur during the school year. A property owner's absolute right to evict tenants is already constrained in a number of other ways, at least in some jurisdictions (e.g., when the eviction is in retaliation for the tenant's assertion of rights, such as having the housing code enforced).

C. Homelessness, Welfare, Child Welfare, and Migrant Family Policies

The few existing federal categorical programs that assist educational stability and educational success for homeless and migrant students should be preserved and expanded, and of course adequately enforced. Information about successful model programs at the state and local levels should be widely disseminated, and replicated all over the country.

In the area of welfare reform, greater awareness of and attention to the classroom turnover problem are warranted. Welfare policies that result in family relocation must be analyzed in light of their unintended negative consequences for education rights: If intergenerational patterns of poverty and welfare dependence are to be ended, adequate education of children is as important a consideration as are issues of parental employment. Timing and necessity of residential relocation in order to meet requirements of or take advantage of opportunities under welfare reform programs need to take place with full appreciation of the associated educational impacts. Federal and state welfare administrators should receive and disseminate materials on the issue of classroom

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mobility, along with recommendations for policy modifications in light of such understanding. Opportunity for adding this important consideration presents itself during the upcoming Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program (TANF) reauthorization process. Among the ways in which welfare reform can reduce student mobility are: use of TANF dollars to avoid or postpone evictions and assist housing programs (including using Individual Development Accounts designed to assist families in saving to buy a home); and using TANF funds to assist with after-school tutoring so as to minimize the negative impacts of school change.[81]

Child welfare, in particular foster care, is another area where increased sensitivity to the problem of school/classroom mobility is warranted. While decisions about placing children in foster homes are complex, at least one important consideration, with respect to location and timing, should relate to the impact on school stability. Wherever possible, such placements should avoid the need to change schools, especially within a school year. Again, educational materials and, as appropriate, directives should be disseminated to government and private social workers working in the foster care system.

In the area of migrant families, the U.S. Department of Education must be far more aggressive in ensuring that electronic interstate records transfer systems are put into place. The Department also needs to ensure that its financing formula acknowledges the current geographical distribution of students — who are appearing in many new places — rather than basing allocations on outdated demographics. Finally, the Department needs to ensure, via closer enforcement, that migrant student program funds are spent so as to produce educational benefits most effectively.

D. Needed Research

Clearly, this is an area where additional research is needed.[82] Among the questions we have initially identified are:

- What is the impact of a highly mobile classroom on the stable students in that classroom?
- What is the impact of highly mobile classrooms on teachers?
- What are the ways in which welfare reform impacts classroom mobility?
- What are the ways in which the child welfare/foster care system impacts classroom mobility?
- What financial costs are imposed on school systems as a result of high classroom mobility?
- How does high mobility impact new accountability systems?
- What is the experience of private/parochial schools with classroom mobility?
- How does the Department of Defense deal with classroom mobility in the schools it runs?
- To what degree do the leading education reform proposals — e.g., higher teacher qualifications, smaller schools/classrooms, improved equipment — reduce classroom mobility?
- What litigation possibilities – in the housing area as well as the education area — exist to force needed change: what are the legal theories, with respect to housing policy, school policy, and other rel-

evant areas, that might produce desirable results?

A multipronged approach to addressing high classroom mobility should seek to support family stability and family-school engagement in an integrated and comprehensive manner as well as protect educational rights by instituting shared responsibility for mobile students among schools, school districts, and government at all levels. It is my hope that this article will be a step in the process of increasing awareness of the centrality of the issue of high classroom turnover and beginning to implement changes in housing, school, welfare, homelessness, migrant worker, and foster care policies that reflect the need both to reduce such damaging turnover and to handle it in the least educationally harmful manner when it cannot be avoided.

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Endnotes

[1] Chester Hartman (*chartman@prrac.org*) is the President/Executive Director of the Poverty & Race Research Action Council in Washington, D.C. PRRAC is a national public interest organization that networks between the civil rights and anti-poverty communities, and provides support for and dissemination of social science research on the intersections of race and poverty that in turn is designed to support a planned advocacy agenda. This chapter is based largely on the June 2000 PRRAC conference, held at Howard University Law School, "High Student Mobility/Classroom Turnover: How to Address It? How to Reduce It?" The conference was supported by grants from the George Gund Foundation and the Spencer Foundation. Sandra Paik, PRRAC's former Director of Education Programs, contributed material to this chapter, and Roger Rosenthal of the Migrant Legal Action Program and Patricia Julianelle of the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty provided helpful consultation.

[2] U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO), *Elementary School Children: Many Change Schools Frequently, Harming Their Education* (Washington, D.C.: GAO 1994) (GAO/HEHS-94-45).

[3] Private/parochial schools are not treated in this chapter, and there appears to be little information about classroom turnover in these systems. Also omitted from this discussion are public schools run by the Department of Defense and the Bureau of Indian Affairs; how the former in particular, where considerable school mobility is essentially built into the assignment rotation system, handles mobility would make an interesting, likely useful inquiry. For a recent general discussion of these systems, *see* U.S. General Accounting Office, "BIA and DOD Schools: Student Achievement and Other Characteristics Often Differ from Public Schools'" (Sept. 28, 2001) (GAO-01-934).

[4] "A Study of Student Mobility in Texas Schools," Statewide Texas Educational Progress Study, Report No. 3 (Austin, TX: Texas Education Agency Mar. 1997) ("Mobility in Texas Schools").

[5] Del Stover, "Schools Grapple with High Mobility Rates," *School Board News* (June 13, 2000) ("Schools Grapple").

[6] Jim Carnes, with Linda Linssen, "Musical Chairs: Booming Las Vegas Schools Struggle to Make a Place for Everyone," *Teaching Tolerance*, at 56-61 (Fall 1997) ("Carnes and Linssen").

[7] Russell W. Rumberger *et al.*, *The Educational Consequences of Mobility for California Students and Schools*, at 23 (Berkeley, CA: Policy Analysis for California Education 1999) ("*Consequences of Mobility*").

[8] *Id.* at 28.

[9] David Kerbow, "Patterns of Urban Student Mobility and Local School Reform," 2 *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk* 150 (1996) ("Patterns").

[10] The only such article we have found appeared in *The Progressive* (Ruth Conniff, "Bounc-

ing from School to School: The Housing Crisis Disrupts the Classroom," *The Progressive*, at 21-25 (Nov. 1998)). Useful bibliographies of the academic literature can be found in Mobility in Texas Schools; Patterns; and Karl L. Alexander, Doris R. Entwisle and Susan L. Dauber, "Children in Motion: School Transfers and Elementary School Performance," 90 *Journal of Educational Research* 3-12 (1996). The National Center for Homeless Education has available on its website (<*www.serve.org/nche*>) an annotated bibliography and article reprints.

[11] Kerbow notes in Patterns, "Without a certain level of stability, it is unclear how school-based educational programs, no matter how innovative, could successfully develop and show long-term impact."

[12] David Kerbow, *Pervasive Student Mobility: A Moving Target for School Improvement*, at iv (Chicago: Center for School Improvement) ("*Pervasive Student Mobility*"); and Patterns.

[13] *Cited in* Mobility in Texas Schools at 9.

[14] *A Report from The Kids Mobility Project*, at 6, 7 (Minneapolis: Family Housing Fund Mar. 1998) ("Kids Mobility Project").

[15] Russell W. Rumberger *et al.*, "The Educational Consequences of Mobility for California Students and Schools," Policy Brief (Berkeley: Policy Analysis for California Education), at 2 (May 1999) ("Rumberger Policy Brief"). Rumberger and his colleagues, in a separate publication, deal with the specific issues facing Latino students; *see* Russell W. Rumberger *et al.*, "The Hazards of Changing Schools for California Latino Adolescents," *CPS Brief* (Oct. 1998).

[16] Patterns.

[17] James E. Bruno and Jo Ann Isken, "Inter- and Intra-school Site Student Transiency: Practical and Theoretical Implications for Instructional Continuity," 29 *Journal of Research and Development in Education* 247.

[18] PRRAC, in conjunction with Legal Services of New York, is currently engaged in a project to assemble available eviction data — magnitude, incidence, causes, results — and propose a national eviction tracking database, to appear initially as a forthcoming article in *Housing Policy Debate* by Chester Hartman and David Robinson.

[19] Rumberger Policy Brief reports that "Our statistical analysis of school test scores found that average student test scores for non-mobile students are significantly lower in high schools with high student mobility rates," a phenomenon they attribute to a "chaos" factor.

[20] Bruno and Isken list other school site impacts caused by transient students, as reported by teachers: added clerical time processing paperwork and finding prior records of arriving students, additional testing and placement time, remediation needs, counseling students, teachers, and families.

[21] David Wood *et al.*, "Impact of Family Relocation on Children's Growth, Development, School Function and Behavior," 270 *Journal of the American Medical Association* 1334-1338 (1993) ("Impact of Family Relocation").

[22] Patterns.

[23] *Consequences of Mobility* at 63.

[24] Kids Mobility Project.

[25] An unusual form of residential instability was reported by an elementary school principal in Las Vegas, where "about two miles from The Strip . . . there are new complexes all over the area. They all offer special 'one month free' move-in rates, so many of our families pick up and move every few months to get the deals." Carnes and Linssen at 56. Mobility in Texas Schools at 8 makes a similar observation: "Some poor families move constantly in order to take advantage of 'move-in specials' at apartment complexes in the area. The students may be at a given school for only three of four months, until they move to the next apartment with a re-

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duced rent."

[26] National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, *Separate and Unequal: A Report on Educational Barriers for Homeless Children and Youth* (Jan. 2000) ("NLCHP Report").

[27] *See* Michael Janofsky, "Debate Weighs Merits of Schools for Homeless," *The New York Times*, Sept. 19, 2001 ("Debate Weighs Merits").

[28] *See* Deborah Stein, "Does Welfare Reform Create, Exacerbate or Ameliorate Student Mobility and Success?," paper prepared for Children's Defense Fund Annual Conference, Apr. 18-21, 2001 ("Does Welfare Reform Create"); "A Multi Dimensional Challenge: How Do Schools, Education Policies, Housing Policies, Child Welfare Policies, and Welfare Reform Create or Exacerbate Mobility?," paper prepared for PRRAC's June 2000 conference mentioned in note 1 ("Multi Dimensional Challenge").

[29] Kristin Anderson Moore, Sharon Vandivere, and Jennifer Ehrle, "Turbulence and Child Well-Being," *in Assessing the New Federalism*, at 3 (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute June 2000) ("Moore *et al.*"). *See generally*, Children's Defense Fund, *Families Struggling to Make It in the Workforce: A Post Welfare Report* (2000).

[30] Moore *et al.*

[31] Does Welfare Reform Create.

[32] Angela M. Branz-Spall and Roger Rosenthal, "What the Title I Migrant Education Program Needs in 2001," *Title I Monitor*, at 1 (Feb. 2001).

[33] National Association of State Directors of Migrant Education (NASDME) and National Association of Migrant Educators, "Giving Migrant Students an Opportunity to Learn" (Sunnyside, WA) (NASDMLE Report).

[34] "In the District [of Columbia], thousands of children have spent four to five years bouncing among foster and institutional homes before they find a permanent home" – and so they are also bouncing among many schools at arbitrary times within the school year. Sari Horwitz and Scott Higham, "Record Numbers of D.C. Children Go to Foster Care," *The Washington Post*, Feb. 28, 2000, at A1. Should there be a return to some improved form of "children's homes," as possibly may be the case, this would have important implications for the education enterprise and the incidence of classroom turnover for these students. *See* Jena Hopfensperger, "Children's Homes: An Old Idea Stirs" (*Minneapolis Star Tribune*, Jan. 27, 2002, at B1), which notes that, according to Prof. Richard Barth of the University of North Carolina, a national expert on children in out-of-home care, "proposals to create new institutions [to remedy failures in the foster care system] are surfacing not just in Minnesota, but nationwide."

[35] Patterns at 154.

[36] *Consequences of Mobility* at 71-78.

[37] Bruno and Isken at 241.

[38] Impact of Family Relocation at 1337.

[39] *Consequences of Mobility* at 26.

[40] Patterns.

[41] *Id.* at 158-59.

[42] Schools Grapple.

[43] Rumberger Policy Brief at 3.

[44] *Consequences of Mobility* at 60.

[45] *Id.* at 33.

[46] NASDME Report.

[47] *See, e.g.*, Kids Mobility Project at 7-8.

[48] *Consequences of Mobility* at 59.

18

[49] Bruno and Isken.

[50] *Id.*

[51] *See* Debate Weighs Merits; NLCHP Report.

[52] Details and further relevant provisions are to be found in section 722(e) and 722(g) of the McKinney-Vento Act and section 1112(a) and 1112(b) of the new ESEA. For further details on the new McKinney-Vento and ESEA legislation, see the National Coalition for the Homeless website: *<www.nationalhomeless.org>*.

[53] See I11. Ann. Stat. ch. 105 S 45/1-15(2) (WESTLAW 2000): "[T]he school district of origin and school district in which the homeless child is living shall meet to apportion the responsibility and costs for providing the child with transportation to and from the school of origin. If the school districts are unable to agree, the responsibility and costs for transportation shall be shared equally."

[54] See Victoria Independent School District, "KIDZ Connection: One Child, One School, One Year."

[55] *<http://ngsmigrant.com>*, 800-365-1873

[56] The contact number for Project SMART is 800-292-7006.

[57] ESTRELLA contacts are 888-637-0555, *info@estrella.org*.

[58] Information about the Texas Migrant Interstate Program is available from *tyanez@hiline.net*, 800-292-7006.

[59] The contact number for the Hotline is 800-234-8848.

[60] The Binational Migrant Education Program is reachable at 512-245-1365 (Frank Contreras, Director).

[61] Additional information on migrant education issues is available from the National Association of State Directors of Migrant Education, *<www.nasdme.org>*, and the Migrant Legal Action Program, *hn1645@handsnet.org*.

[62] *The Principal Advisor*, Vol. 1, No. 2, at 1 (Mar. 2000).

[63] Kids Mobility Project.

[64] Lynn G. Beck, Cindy C. Kratzer, and Jo Ann Isken, "Caring for Transient Students in One Urban Elementary School," 3 *Journal for a Just and Caring Education* 343-369 (1997). *See also* Norma Frank, *Sailing New Seas: Helping Students in Grades 1-4 Cope with Moving* (Warminster, PA: mar*co products 1999), a detailed handbook of useful ideas for students, counselors, teachers, and administrators.

[65] Carnes and Linssen.

[66] The National Trust for Historic Preservation's "Historic Neighborhood Schools Initiative" deals with this issue; *see* Constance E. Beaumont, with Elizabeth Pianca, *Historic Neighborhood Schools in the Age of Sprawl: Why Johnny Can't Walk to School* (Nov. 2000).

[67] For a recent account of one such controversy in a rapidly growing Maryland county, *see* Nurith C. Aizenman, "Howard School Shuffle Creating a Fury," *The Washington Post*, Jan. 13, 2002, at C1. One 14-year-old student cited in this account has lived in the same home since kindergarten, yet will have attended six schools in seven years if the proposed redistricting plan is approved, the combined result of boundary changes and normal progression from elementary to high school.

[68] *See, for example*, Robert C. Johnson, "Dropout Studies Target 'Pockets of Problems,'" *Education Week*, at 3 (Jan. 14, 2001); Michael A. Fletcher, "Progress on Dropout Rate Stalls," *The Washington Post*, Mar. 3, 2001, at A1; Emily Wax, "Rethinking Suspended Education," *The Washington Post*, Jan. 12, 2002, at B1.

[69] Mobility in Texas Schools reports that "on average, student turnover rates among *Low-*

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performing schools were twice as high as those among *Exemplary* schools."

[70] C. Jack Tucker, Jonathan Marx, and Larry Long, "'Moving On': Residential Mobility and Children's School Lives," 71 *Sociology of Education* 125 (1998).

[71] For a detailed presentation of such a program, *see* Institute for Policy Studies Working Group on Housing, *The Right to Housing: A Blueprint for Housing the Nation* (1989).

[72] *See* National Low Income Housing Coalition, "Out of Reach 2001: America's Growing Wage-Rent Disparity" (2001); Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University, "The State of the Nation's Housing 2001" (2001).

[73] *See* Michael S. FitzPatrick, "A Disaster in Every Generation: An Analysis of HOPE VI: HUD's New Big Budget Development Plan," Note, VII *Georgetown Journal on Poverty Law & Policy* 421-448 (2000).

[74] *See* Rick Cohen, "The Role of Community Development Corporations in Implementing a Right to Housing," *in Housing: Foundation of a New Social Agenda* (Rachel G. Bratt, Chester Hartman, and Michael E. Stone eds., Philadelphia: Temple University Press, forthcoming).

[75] Chester Hartman, "The Right to Stay Put," *in Land Reform: American Style* (C. Geisler and F. Popper eds., Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Allanheld 1984); *reprinted in* Chester Hartman, *Between Eminence and Notoriety: Four Decades of Radical Urban Planning* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Center for Urban Policy Research 2002).

[76] For a compendium of such forms of assistance, see the handbook "Displacement: How to Fight It," by Chester Hartman, Dennis Keating, and Richard LeGates (Berkeley, CA: National Housing Law Project 1982).

[77] For details on such programs, see the forthcoming *Housing Policy Debate* article referred to in note 18.

[78] "Protections for Military Renter Households Under the Soldiers' and Sailors' Relief Act," *Housing Law Bulletin*, at 262-263 (Nov./Dec. 2001).

[79] National Housing Law Project, VII *Law Project Bulletin* 1 (Jan./Feb. 1977)

[80] *Flynn v. Cambridge*, 418 N.E. 2d 335 (1981).

[81] *See* Multi Dimensional Challenge.

[82] Under PRRAC's research/advocacy grants program, a number of projects will be commissioned to provide this needed information.

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